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ABSTRACT

This document offers guidelines for providers of continuing education that are the result of a British project at Sandown College, Liverpool, England, designed to develop, pilot, and evaluate a program that would enable a greater percentage of unemployed blacks to gain entry to specific vocational programs. (Those programs were electronics and electrical engineering; music, dance and drama; and health studies and child care.) The following guidelines are among those presented: (1) base the design of vocational curricula on the basic skills and culture of black people; (2) ensure that the course relates to work opportunities; (3) counter racial discrimination in the workplace and college; (4) select black students on potential rather than focusing on existing attainments; (5) consult and develop links with black and ethnic community agencies involved in education and training; (6) deploy black lecturers whenever possible; (7) involve senior college management in supporting antiracism in the college; (8) contact students who fail to complete a course with a view to planning alternative routes; (9) establish review mechanisms for flexible learning opportunities involving outreach, community initiatives, and cooperation between agencies in the black community; and (10) find means of accrediting prior experience and learning that relate to the experience of being black. (CML)

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As part of the Further Education Unit (FEU) REPLAN programme, a research and development project (RP413) was carried out at Sandown College in Liverpool to develop, pilot and evaluate provision which would enable a greater percentage of the unemployed black population to gain entry to mainstream further education in specific vocational areas. Three vocational areas were selected: electronics and electrical engineering; music, dance and drama; health studies and child care. The project had limited success in terms of the numbers of unemployed black adults recruited to the pilot courses, but, nevertheless, the process of developing the courses and the evaluation, which included the recording of staff and student perceptions, raised a series of issues which need to be addressed in the development of provision for unemployed black adults. This bulletin focuses on these issues and concludes with a series of guidelines for further education providers.

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Access to FE for Black Adults

The local community

The black community in Liverpool has particular characteristics. These were summarised in a report to the House of Commons Select Committee on Employment in 1986 by a local consortium of black groups and researchers which showed that:

- the city had a black community of 7-8% established over several generations;
- the city employed less than 1% of black people in its workforce, and was the largest employer in the region;
- the local health authority employed less than 3% of blacks (who were mainly immigrants);
- city centre employers and stores employed less than 1% of blacks. (This percentage is lower than in 1968.)

The situation of disadvantage in terms of employment is not restricted to black people in Liverpool but extends throughout the local white community. There is also a long history of racism in Liverpool going back to the eighteenth century and the period of the slave trade, and there is evidence of continuing discrimination (see I.G. Law and J. Henfrey *A History of Race and Racism in Liverpool 1660-1950* MCRC, 1981).

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Many of the cultural and political characteristics of black groups across the United Kingdom are not shared by Liverpool blacks. In Liverpool, the black community is not predominantly an immigrant community and some would argue that the experience of black settlement in Liverpool may illustrate the future pattern of experience for more recently arrived black immigrant groups.

The particular nature of disadvantage of black unemployed adults in Liverpool was a key issue for the project work.

The college

FEU, in *Black Perspectives on FE Provision* (1985), showed that black students were excluded from certain types of courses in further education and that there was a need to extend opportunities beyond the prevailing narrow curriculum stereotypes. In *FE Black and White* (Longman for FEU, 1987), it was noted that changes in the curriculum, particularly in teaching and learning strategies, were required if colleges were to reverse current practices which were discriminating, racist, ethnocentric and exclusionary.

Although Sandown College had developed successful community-based access to higher education courses for black adults and an employer-based access to business course, there was a notable absence of black students on college vocational courses. There was no formal evidence for this as ethnic monitoring was only introduced in Liverpool in the 1987/88 session, but the predominant impression was that black participation in further education was extremely low.

Vocational courses in further education have traditionally been organised in response to employers' needs and access has been through the apprenticeship system, including part-time and block-release study. The growth of youth unemployment and the virtual collapse of the apprenticeship system in cities such as Liverpool has meant that the number of black students on vocational courses has probably declined. New full-time vocational provision has developed in Sandown College in areas such as electronics, computing, catering and the service professions, but evidence from local Training Agency evaluations and national HMI surveys shows that non-traditional student groups continue to experience disadvantage.

Community consultation

College courses which had been linked with the black community had not always been established on a genuinely collaborative basis. Black community group members spoke of a lack of consultation which had led to distrust of attempts to establish community links.

Differences between colleges and community groups, in terms of organisational culture, resources, location, student support and environment, mean that collaboration is slow to develop and needs continuing support. To function effectively, networks or collaborative links between colleges and black community groups need to establish a climate of trust.

The key issues for the project were the development of trust and a mutual understanding of how further education institutions could change in order to ensure successful entry, progression and completion for black unemployed students.

The curriculum

The further education vocational curriculum derives mainly from a tradition in which the predominant experience was white, male and related to existing job opportunities. *FE in Black and White* identified the need to ensure that the process as well as the outcomes of education and training for black students is relevant to their experience and expectations.

Existing vocational examination based courses need reviewing and developing to meet the needs of black students. Particular issues for curriculum development identified in the project were:

- the experience of black students and minority ethnic communities should be reflected;
- curriculum materials and assessments which avoid discrimination against black students need to be developed;
- ethnocentricity has to be avoided and minority experience recognised.

Staff development

The challenges to the traditional teaching approach presented by the introduction of black students involved staff on the project in open discussion and

dialogue at staff development sessions. Commitment to racial equality needed to be shared, articulated and reinforced. The project did not manage to mount a continuing staff development programme but the sessions that were held highlighted the following issues:

- the need for curriculum development in vocational courses in order to make them suit the needs of black students;
- the need for institutional development and a change in institutional practices that were unhelpful to black students;
- the importance of identifying an awareness of personal development needs by staff in relation to black learners;
- evaluation and review of particular aspects of the curriculum: recruitment selection, interviewing and initial and continuing guidance, counselling and support of students.

The experience of students

Student perceptions of their experience on the pilot course were collected, monitored and evaluated by project staff. Certain recurring issues which arose related to the received value of education and life at college for black students. These issues were related to experience of past and current education; attitudes towards further education and progression; the value of education; reasons for discontinuing courses; mobility and aspirations.

The students' experience of past and current education revealed a background of racism. Mainly negative recollections of previous learning experience influenced perceptions of current learning. Many referred to the fear of being 'shown up' or 'feeling ashamed'. By the time students were questioned in mid-course some of these fears had diminished and they expressed more positive views. Some students commented that the college had a formal atmosphere. These students did not visit the canteen and did not mix with students from other courses. Students also commented that college staff did not liaise with staff from community groups and training organisations.

In their attitudes towards further education and progression, students also commented on the gap between the college and the community. There was felt to be a lack of information about the college. Students also felt that the low numbers of black students and staff acted as a disincentive. Some students were cynical about the value of further education as a means of finding a permanent job.

The main value of education mentioned by students was for vocational qualifications. Emphasis on vocational relevance in all aspects of a training course was seen as important.

Students discontinued the pilot courses for a variety of reasons. The most commonly mentioned were withdrawal of employer support, ending of a Community Programme and unsuitable courses. Several students who discontinued found places on other courses. Some had found employment.

Reponses from several of the students suggested that they would be prepared to travel or move to other parts of the country to find work. In particular, London was felt to be less racist than Liverpool. Some parts of Liverpool were also seen as less welcoming to black people than others.

The students were felt to have low aspirations in terms of employment and accepted a pattern of under-employment. Counselling and guidance were felt to be an important part of courses and some wished this service to be available after the end of their course.

Guidelines for further education providers

As a result of the curriculum development and evaluation of the pilot courses, the project staff drew up the following series of guidelines for further education providers.

Developing a vocational curriculum: relevance to black and minority ethnic groups

Relevant vocational preparation courses are dependent on a number of factors. To develop such courses staff should:

- analyse individual, local and national needs (do not take needs as given for the black communities);
- canvass interests of potential students;
- diagnose needs before courses are written;
- base the design of vocational curricula on the basic skills and cultural background of black people;
- ensure that the course relates to work opportunities;
- counter racial discrimination in the workplace and college;

- integrate specialist skills with training in creative and personal development;
- use students' own experience to enhance learning and increase motivation;
- break down single-subject specialisms in order to make provision flexible;
- select black students on potential rather than focusing on existing attainments;
- assess and clarify routes for progression and ensure these are known by all staff and students;
- tackle race issues within mainstream college policies and procedures.

Publicity and recruitment: community consultation

For successful publicity and marketing of vocational opportunities for black people, staff should:

- approach local community agencies to plan course development;
- involve as many teaching staff as possible in course and curriculum planning with the black community;
- consult and develop links with black and ethnic community agencies involved in education and training;
- plan courses jointly with local community groups and employers and where possible involve them in teaching and recruitment;
- develop publicity material which demonstrates an active multiracial college and anti-racist practices at all levels of college life;
- promote positive success and achievement for black people;
- deploy black lecturers wherever possible;
- build upon personal contacts within the black and minority ethnic communities.

Student support

Learners from ethnic minority groups experience racism as an everyday fact of life. Colleges must combat any such experience within its boundaries:

- senior college management must be involved and maintain a high profile in supporting anti-racism in the college;
- all incidents of racism must be tackled in a committed way by college staff;
- all racist behaviour and practices must be confronted and eradicated;
- black people should be encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of college life;
- students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, e.g. joint student/staff review may be a feature of assessment;
- students who fail to complete a course should be contacted with a view to planning alternative routes;
- counselling and guidance systems must be developed to meet student needs at any stage;
- black students should be able to discuss their problems with a black staff member if they wish.

Management and organisation

Management will need to facilitate and promote the following if multiracial vocational education is to succeed:

- provide good management support systems for staff and students involved in multiracial education;
- show commitment at a personal level to anti-racism in professional work;
- acknowledge the need to have curriculum-led approaches to institutional development via equal opportunities programmes and policies;
- establish review mechanisms for flexible learning opportunities involving outreach, community initiatives and co-operation between agencies in the black community;
- find means of accrediting prior experience and learning which relate to the experience of being black;
- introduce flexibility in timetabling and deployment of lecturers;
- review progress towards an integrated multiracial college;
- commit time and resources to multiracial education and training provision.

For copies of the full report *Access to Vocational FE for Unemployed Black Adults*, further copies of this bulletin and details of the availability of other FEU publications, please contact the FEU Information Centre, 2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE (tel: 01-321 0433 ext. 256).

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